

Abstract 540

TITLE: Educating Toward Behavioral Change for Adolescents at Risk

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ISSUE: The integration of theory into practice has long been a challenge in creating effective HIV prevention interventions. Despite an increase of HIV education among young people, researchers have identified adolescents as a population at disproportionate risk for HIV infection and HIV risk activity.

SETTING: Community-based organization; adolescent peer programs within urban and suburban settings.

PROJECTS: To address this issue, AIDS Community Services of Western New York and Planned Parenthood of Buffalo and Erie Counties have adopted several approaches to incorporate behavioral theory into HIV prevention interventions among adolescents. (1) The collaborating agencies have developed and implemented the Teen Reality Theater group to encourage adolescent peers to role-play and practice risk education skills. (2) They also have utilized adolescents for peer-based HIV education presentations to reinforce HIV education information. (3) Additionally, through weekly peer-group meetings, adolescents have access to ongoing support, current information, and reinforcement of risk reducing behaviors.

RESULTS: The combination of the above mentioned interventions has been responsible for engaging a total of 157 adolescents in behavioral interventions. Evidence suggests that the majority of the individuals involved in at least two of the above interventions have been able to significantly lower the incidence of risk-taking activities during their participation in the programs.

LESSONS LEARNED: Our experience thus far suggests that behavioral interventions can be incorporated and demonstrated effective in HIV prevention work targeting adolescents. Using behavioral models not only prove beneficial when working with adults, but the same principles are a critical component of successful adolescent interventions. The ideas behind these models look beyond abstinence as a goal and focus on the staging of individuals to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Thus, ongoing linkage and support based on behavioral models, is essential to positive decision making and HIV risk reduction among adolescents.

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